United Nations A/58/532

General Assembly

Distr.: General
24 October 2003

Original: English

**Fifty-eighth session**
Agenda item 102
**Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries**

# Participation of the least developed countries at the annual substantive sessions of the Economic and Social Council

## Report of the Secretary-General

*Summary*

The present report is being submitted as follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution E/2003/17 of 23 July 2003, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to make, in consultation with Member States, recommendations to facilitate the participation of the delegations of the least developed countries at the annual substantive sessions of the Council and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

03-57925 (E) 301003

1. In its resolution E/2003/17 of 23 July 2003, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with Member States, to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session recommendations to facilitate the participation of the delegations of the least developed countries at the annual substantive sessions of the Council. The present report is submitted in compliance with the requests contained in that resolution.

2. The Economic and Social Council meets alternatively in New York and Geneva every year. The annual review of the progress in the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 (A/CONF.191/11) is taken up during the Council meetings either in New York or in Geneva, as mandated by the General Assembly and the Council. To undertake an effective and quality annual review of the Brussels Programme, participation of the national focal points or other appropriate representatives of the least developed countries is crucial. Unfortunately, because of severe resource constraints most of the least developed countries are not able to send representatives from their capitals to attend Council sessions.

3. During the July 2003 session of the Economic and Social Council, the issue of securing funding for the participants of least developed countries arose and was discussed. Various views suggested included: (a) annual funding from the regular budget (b) annual funding through the establishment of a trust fund to receive extrabudgetary resources. Additionally, the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States was invited to express his views on the issue of funds for participation of the least developed countries at the Council sessions of the implementation of the Brussels Programme.

4. The least developed countries, the intended beneficiaries of these measures, would prefer that the resources needed to ensure their full participation in sessions of the Council come from the regular budget.

5. It will be recalled that the need to ensure effective and active participation by the least developed countries at the General Assembly has long been recognized and addressed by the General Assembly in resolution 1798 (XVII) of 11 December 1962 and subsequent resolutions, which govern the payment of travel expenses under the regular budget of the United Nations, and provide that travel be paid for not more than five representatives of each Member State designated as a least developed country attending a regular session of the General Assembly.

6. A review of the usage of the provision mentioned in paragraph 5 revealed that the 49 least developed countries are not taking full advantage of their entire entitlements. The data shows that between 1999 and 2002, when a yearly total of 245 tickets was available for least developed countries, on average only about 170 tickets were utilized, representing on average less than 4 tickets per delegation. Detailed data is provided below.

| | *1999* | *2000* | *2001* | *2002* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of countries using 5 tickets/total tickets | 26/130 | 32/160 | 22/110 | 25/125 |
| Number of countries using 4 tickets/total tickets | 4/16 | 6/24 | 9/36 | 8/32 |
| Number of countries using 3 tickets/total tickets | 1/3 | 0/0 | 4/12 | 2/6 |
| Number of countries using 2 tickets/total tickets | 2/4 | 0/0 | 2/4 | 3/6 |
| Number of countries using 1 ticket/total tickets | 2/2 | 1/1 | 2/2 | 3/3 |
| Number of countries not availing themselves of their entitlement | 14/0 | 10/0 | 10/0 | 8/0 |
| **Total tickets issued** | **155** | **185** | **164** | **172** |

7. The Secretary-General has reviewed the matter further and was able to identify other possible courses of action in addition to the proposals made already during the discussion on this matter during sessions of the Economic and Social Council.

8. On the basis of the data available consideration could be given to allocating one of the five air tickets presently provided annually to the least developed countries to participate in the General Assembly sessions, to attend the yearly session of the Economic and Social Council, now that the Council has been entrusted with the review of the Brussels Programme of Action on a yearly basis.

9. Alternatively, the aggregate number of unused tickets could be set aside and remain available from which each delegation could request one ticket to attend the Economic and Social Council.

10. Based on the foregoing analysis, the following four options are thus available:

(a) The General Assembly could decide that those tickets currently authorized for attendance at sessions of the Assembly that remain unused, will be kept in escrow for use on a first come, first served basis for delegations of least developed countries to participate in Economic and Social Council sessions;

(b) The General Assembly could decide to provide one ticket each to delegations of least developed countries to attend Economic and Social Council sessions from within existing resources by reducing the current allocation of five tickets to cover the annual Assembly debate to four, with the remaining ticket set aside for each delegation to attend Council sessions;

(c) The General Assembly could authorize one additional ticket for each least developed country delegation to attend Economic and Social Council sessions. The associated additional resources requirements under the regular budget would be in the order of $196,000 for Council sessions in New York and $145,000, at present rates, for Geneva sessions;

(d) The General Assembly could decide to establish a trust fund and invite Member States to make voluntary contributions to cover the travel expenses of one least developed country member each to the Economic and Social Council sessions.